

Good and short

Mixed shorts programs in Frameline29

by David Lamble

Boys by the Bay C.H.A.M.P. stands for Cannabis Helping Alleviate Medical Problems. In light of the recent distressing Supreme Court decision upholding draconian Federal anti-pot laws, Eric Smith presents a small time-capsule video in memory of his friend Steven, who used his membership to stave off wasting syndrome with some potent brownies. "And you think this is going to stop somebody from busting you?" asks the filmmaker as Steven displays his pot-club membership card, with its photo of himself taken in happier times.

To Hold a Heart There seems to be a Roland Barthes bug going around. Michael Wallin helms the second festival short tipping its hat to the French philosopher. Wallin employs Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* to frame a meditation on a gym relationship between an older white filmmaker and a young Japanese man (Taro Masushio). Wallin explores the halting progress, the awkward moments of courtship that transpire over 10 months. "I longed to touch him but couldn't, except for the perfunctory squeeze of the knee or goodbye hug."

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Thom Gunn - Double Portrait The late poet's "American Boy" is read in a visually arresting double-performance, created by Rudy Lemcke.

Abridged Filmmaker Mark McCormick delivers an ode to the Golden Gate's less sexy but equally potent sister span. Good to watch during this nervous quake season. McCormick notes how the Bay Bridge soothed him during the heady dot-com days, was his trick road to hot sex in a Berkeley bungalow, and provided the setting for the nicest speech his dad would ever utter in his presence. Pretty soon the old lady will be totally made over, and we'll have this film to remember her by. Accompanied by a treasure trove of the best of Joni Mitchell. (*Victoria*, 6/25)

Girls by the Bay Faith-Based Charity Maria Breaux's intriguing short has a lonely mature woman answering an ad to perform an extremely personal service for a younger woman. Nora's (Sarah Korda) unusual need oddly enough fills a thwarted desire in Maggie's (Veneita Porter) life. A terrific, offbeat idea, beautifully executed.

Our Life, A Hidden Life Alexa Inkeles introduces us to the members and the parents of members

of the largest queer rights group in Brazil. Some tell stories of unexpected acceptance at home, and some still have a way to go. Since 1996, the group has been pushing the frontiers for human rights in a society where lawless elements (some on government payrolls) still terrorize sexual/social minorities. (*Victoria*, 6/25)

Luck Be a Lady You're Still Young In Barbara Green's gritty yet dreamlike short, Becky (Crystal Day), a depressed 16-year-old, finds an unexpected mentor in the last booth of a diner specializing in extra-crispy fries and the best advice you'll ever get. Hand-held camerawork and a good music track flesh out a slice of heartfelt social realism.

In Elizabeth McCarthy's *Everything Good*, a sexual take-out service gives a middle-aged woman quite a bit more than she bargained for. "Ivana, we both know you do what you do for the money." "That is what you think I know. Money is good, but human touch is better." The world would truly be a better place if sex work could be organized like this. A nifty script by Caren M. Block, with soulful performances by Lea Tolub Brandenburg as Lila the client; Judith Partelow, terrific as the call-girl who really wants to please; and Carolina Kava, a perfect Madam who gives the right accent to a very ample menu of treats. (*Roxie*, 6/25) ▼



Photo courtesy of Frameline29

Night Scene explores male prostitution in the new Chinese economy.

Frameline29

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gives us tantalizing snippets of Nathan's checkered past, erotic snapshots as brutally revealing as old prize-fights. Amber Benson, as Tara, graduates from her sidekick role on TV's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to trade verbal punches with the champ, a boy/man who calls her his girlfriend when confronted with an old college buddy he's not out to.

"Must be exhausting keeping all those façades percolating along. Something about a serial need to seduce people reeks of self-loathing."

Climaxing in the mud-bath from hell, this is a prescient look at a frisky collection of metrosexuals where anybody can be had, if not happy. (*Castro*, 6/24; *Victoria*, 6/25)

Life in a Box Welcome to the looking-glass world of gay showbiz. Jay and Steven were lovers, country singers, funny, talented guys whose lives became caught up in their act. They called themselves Y'all, and they lived a pretty good if hardscrabble life on the road. This funny and predictable and slightly disappointing life changed suddenly when a third man, Roger, and his dog joined the relationship. That was wonderful, until it wasn't. Part *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, part Grand Ole Opry, part gay male *Scenes from a Marriage*, produced, directed and co-edited from over 250 hours of video by Steven Cheslik-DeMeyer. (*Roxie*, 6/25)

Transamerica Unscreened but with terrific buzz. Felicity Huffman (most recently of *Desperate Housewives*) is Bree, a person in

the final stages of changing sexes, but not before she cleans up a bit of unfinished business. Learning she has a son from a long-ago one-night-stand, Bree travels to New York to rescue the troubled adolescent. Toby (Leo lookalike Kevin Zegers) is a rent boy who asks Bree to take him with her to L.A. (*Castro*, *Closing Night*, 6/26)

Night Scene A handsome youth stares into the camera, popping gum into his mouth. "I'm still a virgin. Are you interested in me?" Director Cui Zi'en bravely explores a very taboo sphere of the new China economy, male prostitution as a huge growth industry. With a mix of real "gigolos," as they call themselves, and actors playing rent boys, the filmmaker probes the motives of the often fresh-from-the-country bumpkins who service other men. Beginning with a classic Chinese film image: a guy stares into a fish tank and confesses to feeling "sick and cheap" after a client requested a blow-job. Afterwards, he cries. Another says defiantly, "I hate men. That's why I sold my body to them." (*Roxie*, 6/25)

The Last Day Director Rodolphe Marconi plunges us into the family secrets buried in a coastal hideaway when moody 18-year-old art student Simon (the ravishing Gaspard Ulliel) comes home on a Christmas school-break, passing off Louise, a stranger he met on the train, as his girlfriend. An old boyfriend, Mathieu, pops up, and tension mounts. An unexpectedly moving masturbation scene prepares us for the poignant resolution of a stressful holiday. Ah, the French, they fuck each other and fuck with our heads. (*Victoria*, 6/24) ▼

Mark Weigle

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States "who would go into tirades about how 'Americans think we're these little ceramic guys' even as he's working three jobs, studying English at night, working his ass off. Still, he'd get called lazy by slob."

What are the Mothers of the Disappeared doing on a "queer" album?

"Well, my lover of eight years is from Argentina, Daniel Felitti, and I got to go to Argentina and saw the Mothers of the Disappeared. Plus I have a lot of problems with our society here in the US, our *Kulture* with a K. I'm really attracted to Central and South American culture, I think it's much more real and laid-back. I'm attracted to that."

The real goldmine for guys attempting to marry spirit and sex is found in the "Versatile" CD, with its emphasis on the nitty-gritty of gay life. It traverses through a list

of erotic positions, styles, body parts and kinky propositions. But the core is Weigle's compassion, emphasized in the title song, "SoulSex," in two versions, one louder and more insistent, the other softer and more supplicating. Weigle says the song acknowledges his older gay brothers "who talk about the intensity of body-fluid exchange back in the '70s heyday, when you grew up alone thinking you're the only queer in the world. Then you meet your tribe, and it's like this incredible festival of fuckin' and suckin' and the sacredness of coming inside each other. That was hard for a lot of guys to let go of. AIDS came along, so basically what I'm saying in 'SoulSex' is that body fluids are not what it's really about. It's not the sacred part. The powerful part, potentially, of two men making love is the emotional/soulful connection. You can still have that with rubbers on and no fluid exchange, if you just open yourselves to each other in that way. Bring your heart to it." ▼

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Packaging movie stars

The life of Hollywood agent Henry Willson, 'The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson.'

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Male bonding

'Matt & Ben' sends up Damon & Affleck onstage.

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Dramatic soprano

Catherine Naglestad is 'Norma' for SF Opera.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Through a lens, queerly



Karen Everett with two lovers in *Women in Love*.

Outcast Films

Program highlights from the 21st Film Arts Festival

by David Lamble

This year's Film Arts Festival puts a great emphasis on the search for personal happiness and the many pitfalls between the seeker and her goal. Playing through November 9 at the Roxie Cinema, the San Francisco Jewish Community Center, the Parkway Theatre in Oakland and the Rafael Film Cen-

ter in San Rafael are a dozen and a half programs with FAF's usual emphasis on Bay Area-generated short films.

Women in Love About 14 minutes into Karen Everett's boldly personal, disarming and wryly funny chronicle of a 14-year San Francisco lesbian love-fest *Women in Love*, the filmmaker finds herself in the honeymoon of honeymoons, having some of the best sex of her life with the woman she knows she wants to be

with forever. Because she never seems to do anything without simultaneously filming it, we feel that we just may be having the best lesbian sex we'll ever have. What is there about sex with your girlfriend alongside a small body of water in a foreign country that suddenly turns erotic bliss into anxiety? We're as happy as we can be, and it can't possibly last!

Unlike the gay boys of yore who played until they

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A view from inside *Three Gems*, a "sky-space" by artist James Turrell.

Diamonds and rust

Commissioned artworks impress at the new de Young

by Will Shank

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco have positioned themselves as serious players in the contemporary-art biz with the flashy opening of the new de Young Museum. No more obvious a gesture could be made than the high visibility of several pieces commissioned of blue-chip American and European artists that are on display in the opening

season of the revived museum in Golden Gate Park. They will all presumably become fixtures in their current locations.

The first thing that the visitor cannot help but notice upon entering the central Wilsey Court is an enormous installation on the west wall by German *Wunderkind* Gerhard Richter. One is used to expecting the unexpected from Richter, whose production varies from the wildly abstract to the seductively realistic. Is this one an op-art painting, or an enormous photograph? As one approaches *Strontium*, which measures almost 31 by 30 feet, one realizes that it is a series of panels installed side by side. The piece actually comprises 130 digital prints mounted on aluminum with a Plexiglas coating, and the optical effect, especially as the

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SECOND OF TWO SECTIONS

Film Arts Fest

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dropped, the young women of the lusty, busty, lesbian 90s would play and talk, talk and play. Faced with a choice between monogamy and polygamy, why not go for the best of both? Drawing on over 200 hours of personal camera diaries, videos of the new strap-on sexual style, and heart-to-the-camera conversations (seamlessly edited with the deft assistance of Deborah Hoffman), Everett puts us in the middle of a daisy-chain circle of her friends. Drawing on her brilliant late mentor Marlon Riggs (*Tongues Untied*), Everett allows herself to be naked before the camera; taking a page from Ross McElwee (*Sherman's March*), she decides that the truth, however personally embarrassing, is best sought by talking to as many of the women you have loved as possible.

The long-term coupling of her best friends and video partners, Jackie and Shar, becomes a kind of unobtainable but much-admired holy grail. But the down-and-dirty reality of life with ex-lovers Phyllis and Annika tempers Everett's desire that she can ever have it all with just one woman.

Midway through, we find ourselves in a Berkeley workshop for "ethical sluthood" where a matringly moderator suggests "responsible non-monogamy" as a "management" tool for healthy relationships. That this comment can come off as both hilarious and prescient sums up the joys of living through this little gem of a film. An epilogue at the City Hall nuptials reveals how different wings of Everett's relationship lab have fared. By film's end, we're grateful Everett didn't follow frequent injunctions to put her camera down and take her life more seriously. (*Roxie*, 11/4, 10 p.m.)

Shorts: Love To Hold a Heart An outstanding reprise from this year's Frameline Festival. Michael Wallin employs Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* to frame a meditation on the gym relationship between an older white filmmak-



Syphilis Diller in *Blood, Sweat and Glitter*, one of the contestants for the 2004 Miss Trannyshack contest.

er and a young Japanese man (Taro Masushio). The young guy just turns up one day in his baggy red shorts, the way the most elusive and irresistible young men tend to do.

Wallin explores the halting progress and the awkward moments of courtship that transpire over 10 months. "I longed to touch him but couldn't, except for the perfunctory squeeze of the knee or goodbye hug," Taro replies, "The older person desires a younger man. The younger person needs the older one." The film gives the bittersweet confirmation of this wisdom.

This enchanting short wisely sidesteps rhetorical arguments about the ethics of transgenerational and cross-cultural relationships. Its focus instead is on the tantalizing art of when and how to reach out to the object of one's desire. Michael Kaulkin's music gives a elegiac mood to Wallin's method of presenting the beloved in a series of video snapshots, in varying states of dress and arousal.

Phantom Limb The brilliant Jay Rosenblatt returns with a complex video essay on the nature of grief. Prompted by the still-traumatic memory of the sudden death of his younger brother at age six, Rosenblatt uses his usual mix of found footage, family films and present-tense interviews to frame one of the most difficult subjects in this live-for-the-day culture. Particularly arresting is a long chapter whose visuals are devoted to the shearing of a mostly pliant sheep. (*Roxie*, 11/4, 6 p.m.)

Blood, Sweat and Glitter Despite screening to acclaim at Frameline, Sasha Aickin's absorbing look at the backstage preparations for the 2004 Miss Trannyshack contest has largely flown under the radar screen, which is a pity because it's a fabulous piece of filmmaking on a subject many of us dismiss out of hand. It opens with a flash-forward as a group gathers in a dressing room to debate the merits of the contestants. The judges at first confirmed all my fears about drag: bitter, opinionated, back-stabbing queens. But Aickin won me over with scintillating portraits of five of the nine contestants.

Diva Dan's elaborate stage show, where he mimes blowing a man (his lover) in a horse costume, is like a delightfully obscene Macy's Thanksgiving Day float. He's brutally frank. "I know when people are better than me, so when people who are not better than me beat me at something, I don't like it." Syphilis Diller admits it's weird

to hear his drag name called out "when you're walking down the street. I don't know if my mom would deal with 'Syphilis' that well." Cookie Dough is a recovering "performance delusionist" who picked his drag moniker while on acid. Cookie admits to having run with the wrong crowd growing up: his drug-addicted biological family. Veda De Voe is a beautiful young man who says his older boyfriend got him into a bad scene when he was 14. Veda thanks his sister from saving him from the oblivion of adolescent addiction: "She's my best friend, therapist and director." Anna Conda modeled himself after dumb blondes "like Christina Applegate, people who are really stupid and yet smart at the same time." Kiddie, a young man whose actual singing voice and mesmerizing stage presence make him hard to classify, says his show allows his odd personality to come in on a channel others can receive.

Four of five have compelling credentials for their stab at stardom, and the judges' decision turns out to be fraught with misgivings and confusion. The cliffhanger of whether anybody was robbed, and how the winners and losers react five months later, makes for a compelling only-in-SF event. This is way better than *Wigstock*. (*Roxie*, 11/4, 11:30 p.m.)

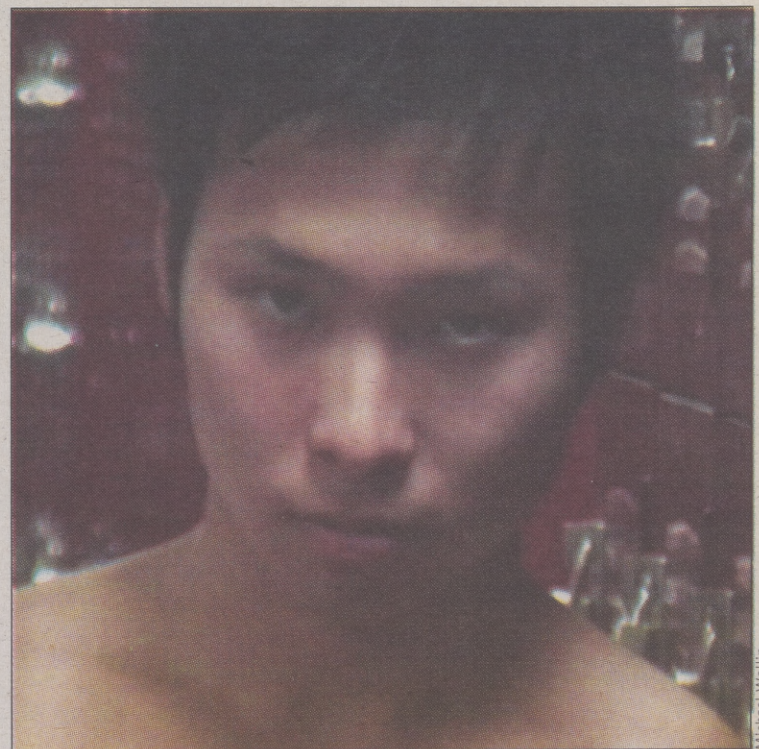
Prospect Octavio Solis adapts his quasi-autobiographical play about a young Mexican-American having a hard day's night in the drug-infested Greenville Avenue district of Dallas. Scout's hell is actually

the fuzzy border between his Tex-Mex roots and his poser identity as a computer-nerdy white kid from Ponder, Texas. Sean San Jose is seductive as the boyish Scout. His facade and contact lens are lost following a night in the sack with a dying woman who invokes the spirit of his late grandma. Slightly derivative of late Tennessee Williams, the film employs touches of magic realism to frame a comedy that is entertaining if still a tad stagebound. (*Roxie*, 11/6, 4:10 p.m.)

Shorts: Collections This program about people who save odd stuff is highlighted by *Graceland Too*, Ryan Beebe and Erin Stamos' wry look at the small-town Mississippi home of Paul MacLeod. The jumpsuit-attired curator has amassed a huge and eccentric collection of Elvis memorabilia that might make even an Elvis impersonator long for an extreme makeover. MacLeod's collections, which have driven away his family and annoyed his neighbors, include not only Elvis recordings, posters and T-shirts, but a logbook of notations of every time the King is mentioned on TV. During filming, MacLeod was turning his backyard into a replica of the set for *Jailhouse Rock*.

Miss Flighty in Orbit is Stefan Gruenwedel's tasteful tribute to the Orbit Lounge's female bartender who has amassed probably the world's largest collection of flight-bags from out-of-business airlines. A rare look at Pan Am chic. (*Roxie*, 11/6, Noon)

More info at filmarts.org. ▼



Taro Masushio in Michael Wallin's *To Hold a Heart*, part of *Shorts: Love*.

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